

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

OMB-01 CAB-02 COME-00 DOTE-00 EB-07 FAA-00 /080 W

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P R 130500Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4988

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY

AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY

AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 3680

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PK, IN

SUBJECT: INDO-PAK RELATIONS

1. PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO DISCLOSED AT A LAHORE PRESS CONFERENCE APRIL 10 THAT HE HAD WRITTEN TO INDIAN PM GANDHI ABOUT TWO WEEKS EARLIER MAKING AN OFFER TO WITHDRAW PAKISTAN'S 1971 HIJACKING CASE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION. HE SAID NO REPLY HAD YET BEEN RECEIVED FROM NEW DELHI. BHUTTO, WHO WAS REPLYING TO A QUESTION ON INDO-PAK RELATIONS PROMPTED BY PUBLICATION HERE OF SENATOR MCGOVERN'S APRIL 7 PRESS RELEASE ON HIS JANUARY VISIT TO THE SUBCONTINENT, MAINTAINED THAT THE RESUMPTION OF OVERFLIGHTS WAS OF MUTUAL BENEFIT TO BOTH COUNTRIES, AND PROFESSED TO BE AT A LOSS AS TO WHY GOI HAD NOT RESPONDED TO AN OFFER WHICH MET ITS OWN DEMAND. HE DESCRIBED HIS OFFER AS BEST TEST OF PAK DESIRE FOR NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS. NOTING THAT INDIANS ALSO CONTINUED TO REFUSE TO REESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, PM SAID IT WAS FOR WORLD TO SEE WHO WAS IMPEDING NORMALIZATION PROCESS.

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2. WHETHER OR NOT BHUTTO'S FRESH INITIATIVE LEADS TO BREAKTHROUGH

ON LONG-STALLED CIVIL AIR ISSUE, IT DOES FURTHER HIGHLIGHT CONCILIATORY APPROACH PAKS HAVE TAKEN OVER PAST FEW MONTHS TOWARD RELATIONS WITH INDIA. THIS ATTITUDE HAS BEEN MOST NOTABLE IN GOP TREATMENT OF STRING OF ANTI-PAK ALLEGATIONS COMING FROM INDIAN SIDE (AND REPORTED IN EMBASSY NEW DELHI MESSAGES). PAKS HAVE FOR THE MOST PART PREFERRED TO IGNORE THESE, OR TO GIVE THEM LITTLE MORE THAN PASSING REFERENCE, AS BHUTTO DID IN LAHORE WHEN HE REPORTEDLY MENTIONED THAT EVERY SECOND OR THIRD DAY THE INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTER TALKED ABOUT PAKISTAN'S ARMED STRENGTH. PAKS HAVE GENERALLY AVOIDED BRINGING UP INDO-PAK RELATIONS, AND THE FEW STATEMENTS THEY HAVE MADE (SUCH AS BHUTTO'S IN QUETTA ON APRIL 7, KARACHI 1542) HAVE BEEN QUITE MEASURED BY SUBCONTINENTAL STANDARDS.

3. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND OF CONCILIATORY GESTURES, BHUTTO'S OFFER SEEMS MORE THAN ANOTHER PUBLIC RELATIONS PLOY WHICH WILL MAKE PAKISTAN LOOK GOOD AND INDIA BAD SHOULD THE GOI REJECT IT, THOUGH THAT ELEMENT TOO ALMOST CERTAINLY ENTERED INTO PAK THINKING WHEN THE LETTER WAS CONCEIVED. IN ANY EVENT, THE OFFER SEEMS A NO-LOSE PROPOSITION FOR THE GOP: IF THE GOI ACCEPTS IT THAT WILL OPEN THE WAY FOR OVERFLIGHTS, WHICH THE PAKS HAVE WANTED MORE THAN THE INDIANS SINCE THE OVERTHROW OF MJIB; IF THEY TURN IT DOWN, INDIAN STONEWALLING WILL BECOME EVEN MORE EVIDENT, HOWEVER, THE GOI MAY SEEK TO JUSTIFY ITS STAND BY ARGUING THAT PAK PROPAGANDA, ARMAMENTS, ETC., MAKE THE ATMOSPHERE INAPPROPRIATE FOR PROGRESS ON THE CIVIL AIR FRONT.

4. DISCUSSING INDO-PAK RELATIONS WITH POLITICAL COUNSELOR APRIL 12, MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL (SOUTH ASIA) HAYAT MEHDI CONFIRMED THAT PAKS WERE TRYING TO AVOID LONG FAMILIAR TIT-FOR-TAT APPROACH. MFA PRACTICE AT THIS TIME WAS NOT TO REPLY TO STATEMENTS BY INDIAN LEADERS EXCEPT TO CORRECT SPECIFIC MISSTATEMENTS OF FACT, HE SAID. SAME RULE ALSO APPLIED TO RECENTLY PUBLISHED ANNUAL REPORTS OF INDIAN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE MINISTRIES, BOTH OF WHICH MEHDI FOUND HARSHER THAN THOSE OF PREVIOUS YEAR. HE CLAIMED THAT CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE WAS BEING BROUGHT TO BEAR BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE MINISTRY TO ABANDON PRESENT RESTRAINED APPROACH.

5. MEHDI SAID THAT BHUTTO'S MESSAGE TO MRS. GANDHI REMAINED UNANSWERED. HE ADOPTED A WAIT AND SEE APPROACH, BUT WAS CERTAINLY CONFIDENTIAL

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UNDER NO ILLUSIONS THAT THE INDIANS WOULD WANT FOR REASONS TO TURN THE BHUTTO OFFER DOWN, OR ASIDE, IF THEY DECIDED IT WAS IN THEIR INTEREST TO DO SO. HE EXPRESSED PRIVATE DISAPPOINTMENT THAT THE NEW LEADERSHIP AT MFA HAD NOT YET GIVEN ANY INDICATION THAT IT WOULD ADOPT A MORE FORTHCOMING APPROACH TO INDO-PAK MATTERS.

6. ON OTHER ASPECTS OF INDO-PAK RELATIONS, MEHDI ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE RAIL LINK ON THE PAK SIDE BETWEEN LAHORE AND THE WAGAH

BORDER HAD NOW BEEN PUT INTO OPERATION AND THE INDIANS HAD BEEN SO INFORMED. THE PAKS HAD NOT HAD A REPLY, AND MEHDI SAID HE BELIEVED THAT THE RAIL LINE ON THE INDIAN SIDE WAS STILL UNREPAIRED. THE PAKS HAVE NOW SUGGESTED TO THE INDIANS THAT NEGOTIATIONS ON THE MARITIME BOUNDARY BEGIN IN LATE MAY, WHEN REPS NOW AT THE LAW OF THE SEA CONFERENCE WILL AGAIN BE AVAILABLE. ON SALAL DAM, THE PAKS HAVE NOW CONCEDED TO THE INDIAN INSISTENCE THAT A FORMAL SESSION OF THE INDUS WATERS COMMISSION BE HELD TO DETERMINE THAT THE TWO SIDES HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO RESOLVE THEIR DIFFERENCES. WHEN THIS HAS BEEN HELD THE TWO SIDES WILL PROCEED WITH THE 1960 TREATY PROVISIONS ON THE SELECTION OF A NEUTRAL EXPERT.
BYROADE

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